



EPISODE 2x15: “SHARDS”

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EXT. SPACE – ESTABLISHING

A rocket-propelled HARPOON, trailing a steel CABLE, shoots out into space.

It penetrates a silver metallic WALL, and the cable goes taut.

PULL BACK: the wall is a tiny part of a large modern-looking SPACE STATION. There are a big HOLES punched in the hull throughout the station, which sits powerless and dead.

Three small white SHUTTLES are docked at the station, though powerless as well.

Serenity hovers close to the station. This is where the steel cable comes from.

INT. SERENITY – AIRLOCK

The airlock is open to the black. ZOE, decked out in her SPACE SUIT, holds the harpoon LAUNCHER, now with a taut cable connecting it to the station. On the top of the launcher a small green LIGHT blinks on.

Zoe attaches a safety cable from her suit to the harpoon cable connecting Serenity to the wrecked space station.

ZOE

I'm tethered. You see what I'm seeing, baby?

WASH (via com)

I do at that.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

WASH, sitting in his chair, stares out at the pock-marked station. MAL and SIMON stand behind him, also looking out.

WASH (cont'd)

She's won't be winning any beauty contests.

ZOE (via com)

Haven't seen damage like this since the war... Cable's secure. I'm going sailing.

WASH

I'm your anchor, *baō bei*.

Through the bridge window, we see Zoe, visible only by the illumination from her torch head lights, rappelling along the cable toward the station.

SIMON
Is this as far as we're going to go?

MAL
(subdued)
Don't know.

SIMON
All those fine words you've spouted—

ZOE (via com)
Just be glad that we've come all this way for your
haunted house, Doctor.

SIMON
(to Mal)
We're so close to Miranda. Only a few hours out!

MAL
I am real tired of repeating myself with you. Drop it.

Simon stares ahead through the bridge window, defeated. He lets out a big SIGH.

MAL (cont'd)
You got something else to share?

SIMON
I'm dropping it.

MAL
I can see that.

Another long silence.

ZOE (via com)
I'm on. Sending the line back for Ben.

WASH
Copy. Ben, you ready down there?

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

BEN HICKS twists his helmet on tight, though at a slightly odd angle. He looks less than ready in a suit a little too big for him.

BEN

I guess... How's the Saint what's-her-name looking?

WASH (via helmet com)

You know how you look first thing in the morning?

BEN

That bad, huh?

WASH (via com)

Worse. It's pretty Swiss-cheesed. No grav. No life support.

BEN

(utterly unenthused)

Tasty.

In the background, KAYLEE walks in, leading a stumbling RIVER. She's cuffed, and by the look of her, sedated heavily. River trips over herself, barely able to stand up.

KAYLEE

Easy, sweetie. You ain't used those legs of yours in three days. Let's go slow, huh?

(noticing Ben)

Oh, hey, Ben. Space-walk time?

BEN

Or vacuum-induced-death time. Could really swing either way.

(indicates the crooked helmet)

Can you help me with this thing?

Kaylee repositions his helmet, and smiles. River seems dissociated from all interaction, staring at the airlock door.

INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE

Simon doesn't look away from the viewport.

SIMON

Miranda could be the answer to everything, Captain. Instead we're playing around with a broken space station.

WASH

Playing? Universe said the Saint Elpis was the last—

SIMON

I know. And I'm grateful. I just... I don't know why we're picking rotten fruit off the ground when the tree is right there.

MAL

Because the tree is going to shoot you.

Simon looks at him, a bit confused.

MAL (cont'd)

(smirks)

Never did grasp things metaphorical.

INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY

Kaylee plugs the oxygen hoses into Ben's helmet. Neither of them notice River is clawing at the airlock door, staring through the window. Her movements are skulking, furtive. Prey.

RIVER

(whisper, unnoticed)

They're coming. They're coming. They're coming. They're coming.

KAYLEE

There you go, Ben. All wrapped 'n ready to swim. I'll join you out there in a jiff, soon's I get River back—

RIVER

(louder, rambling)

They're coming they're coming they're coming they're coming...

River scratches at the glass like a dog scratching at a closed door.

KAYLEE

River, sweetie, wha—?

RIVER

(shouting, raw)

They're coming! They're coming they're coming THEY'RE COMING!

River rushes the airlock door controls, and presses a BUTTON.

KLAXONS sound and WARNING LIGHTS flash. The airlock doors begin to slide open, as atmosphere whistles out into the black.

Instantly, from nowhere, JAYNE dives past River, knocking her to the side, and presses another button.

The doors close. Kaylee leans against the wall in relief.

Jayne grabs River roughly by the hair, snapping her head back, leading her back to Kaylee like a dog on a leash.

JAYNE

You was s'posed to watch her! She near got us all killed...
Again.



Jayne still holds River by the hair, pulling her head back. She doesn't struggle. She looks tired. Resigned.

Kaylee wearily punches the wall-com.

KAYLEE (into com)
(sadly)
Simon, we need you down here.

RIVER
(matter-of-fact)
They're coming.

Ben hasn't moved throughout the whole thing. Finally, he closes his mouth.

BEN

What in the *dai mao rong di yu zhou* <big furry universe> is going on!?

KAYLEE

River's still a little sick.

JAYNE

Yeah. Like the Alliance is a 'little' army.

BEN

This is *fēng* <insane>!

JAYNE

This is Serenity.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE

Simon brushes past Mal, as he steps out the bridge.

Quiet.

MAL

Tian chen mo <Sweet silence>.

WASH

He's just feeling pretty useless up here, Mal. Maybe he'd like to help retrieve those data logs or something.

Through the window, Ben moves jerkily along the cable, a bright light in the black.

MAL

Universe said the Miranda logs'll be encrypted on the station's main computer, and that's what we got Ben all the way out here for. If the doc's gonna steal his electronic thunder, I'm gonna have to let Ben cut someone open.

Wash raises an eyebrow.

MAL (cont'd)

(shrugs)

It's only fair.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY

Simon injects River with a clear solution.

RIVER

They're coming, Simon. They're c—

Immediately, she's asleep. Jayne lets go of her hair as he lowers her to the floor.

KAYLEE

I'm sorry, Simon.

SIMON

So am I.

EXT. SAINT ELPIS

Ben SLAMS softly into the wall of the space station, tangled up in the line.

Zoe unhooks him.

ZOE (into com)

We're good. Kaylee, suit up. You're next.

She looks out at space, the emptiness of it, which becomes the sky above—

EXT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – NIGHT – ESTABLISHING

The opulent training house sits next to a river.

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S ROOM – NIGHT

INARA, dressed for bed, kneels before a large, white BUDDHA STATUE. She removes a yellow stick of INCENSE from a bag at the base of the statue and lights it with a match. Holding it before her, she takes a deep breath, closes her eyes.

INARA

(chanting)

Om mani padme hum... Om mani padme hum...

She blows out the FLAME of the incense and places it in a holder in front of the statue. It creates a thin trail of smoke through the air.

INARA (cont'd)

Blessed One, my whole life I have travelled the eight-fold path. For a time, I was lost. I was lost in the woods...

EXT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – NIGHT

We hear footsteps. Many. On the march.

A MAN—dressed in quasi-military garb—walks up the front stairs of the Training House. We only see him from behind.

INARA (cont'd, VO)
...But now, I've found the path again.

Uniformed ALLIANCE SOLDIERS, their faces half-hidden by tinted riot face-plates and shadowed by the night, are flanked behind him.

INARA (cont'd, VO)
Thank you for sending me someone to help light my way...

The man enters the training house.

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S ROOM

The incense continues to smoke.

INARA (cont'd)
You teach us, Blessed One, that we only experience suffering when we choose to. We impose it upon ourselves with thoughts, desires for things we can never have. I have been suffering for a long time.
(contemplative beat)
But I'm ready now, Blessed One, to let it go. I'm ready to accept your teachings, and to feel—

She is interrupted by a loud KNOCK on the door. She recovers. Smiles.

INARA (cont'd)
...peace.

She stands up and walks to the door. Opens it.

Her smile falters as she sees—

The man—The Operative she knows as Jude—flanked by two soldiers, at the other side of the door. The Operative smiles sadly.

OPERATIVE
Good evening, Inara.

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA’S ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Inara stands in the doorway, looking at The Operative with a mix of devastation and disbelief. He holds her gaze, standing at ease with his arms behind his back, cool and reserved.

OPERATIVE
May I come in?

Her eyes flicker towards the guards.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
Only me.

She hesitates, then steps back.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
(to the soldiers)
Stand guard. Permit no entrance.

As he enters, one of the soldiers hands him a BRIEFCASE, which he sets down just inside the room. Inara shuts the door behind him.

She stands for a moment, frozen, hand still on the knob. She is in focus, the Operative a blur behind her.

INARA
Your name isn't Jude.

OPERATIVE
No.

A beat, then she rushes across the room, picks up a tray with a tea set. The china RATTLES alarmingly as she carries it.

Inara sets the tea set on the floor between two pillows. She sits on one pillow. The Operative sits on the other.

Inara pours them each a cup – hot liquid sloshing over the edge of the cup as she hands it to him. If she's burned his hand, he doesn't react.

He takes a sip. She does the same.

OPERATIVE
This is excellent. *Xie-xie* <Thank you>.

INARA
(refuses to meet his eyes)
It wasn't supposed to be for you.

OPERATIVE
Inara...

He reaches for her, but stops himself.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
I wouldn't... This isn't to hurt you.

INARA
No one said it was. I never said it was.

OPERATIVE
But it's what you're thinking, isn't it? You wonder why I'm here. What I want. Why I hurt you, when we were so close.

INARA
We weren't close.

OPERATIVE
You made love to me, Inara.

INARA
I was vulnerable. You used me. You lied to me.

OPERATIVE
Yes, I did.

Inara's hands still shake as she takes another sip of tea.

The Operative stands up, walks over to the window. Inara follows him with her eyes, but doesn't move.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
I must tell you, that did make it easier. Your vulnerability.

She puts the tea down. Closes her eyes.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
You were very, very good. You told me so much, but not the things I truly needed to know. Not until that moment. I'm sure Captain Reynolds would be proud of you.

Inara opens her eyes, and something has changed: she isn't hurt – she's angry.

INARA

How dare you.

The Operative turns back to her, smiles at her change in temperament, amused but not concerned.

OPERATIVE

I thought you rather enjoyed bringing Malcolm Reynolds into conversations he's not a part of. I understand, though, my darling. You just can't get enough of the ones who hurt you.

INARA

You haven't hurt me.

OPERATIVE

Haven't I?

INARA

I'm not hurt. I'm angry.

OPERATIVE

Furious, I'm sure. That's easier to feel, I imagine, than the pain. Wear it now, while you can, Inara. But know that I will hurt you if I have to.

He comes closer.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

It's regrettable. Necessary. I've come to admire your spirit, Inara, and a spirit, once broken, cannot be fixed.

She stands. Starts to move toward the statue of Buddha, where the incense still smokes. If The Operative's words have gotten to her, it's not quite showing.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

(eerily gentle)

Do you know what an Operative of Parliament is, Inara?
What I am?

INARA

Yes.

OPERATIVE

That's good. Then you appreciate my resolve. You know that I am in complete control. You do understand that?

Her eyes are cold as she meets his gaze.

INARA

I think you're the one who doesn't understand. I am a member in high standing of the Companion's Guild. Whatever you think is going to happen, it won't. The Guild will see to that.

OPERATIVE

The Guild provided me with the paperwork linking you to Serenity. To Captain Reynolds.

Inara isn't prepared for that—but she recovers quickly.

INARA

So he does belong in this conversation, then?

OPERATIVE

It's interesting, isn't it Inara? He brought us together, and now he's tearing us apart.

She takes a few slow steps toward the Buddha statue, circling wide around the Operative.

INARA

(business-like)

You can stop that. It isn't working.

OPERATIVE

Stop what, Inara?

INARA

You're trying to make me uncomfortable, unstable, by evoking an emotional response to Malcolm Reynolds. It's not going to work. I know how this game works. You can't manipulate me.

OPERATIVE

It seems that I already have.

She's losing. She knows it.

INARA

Why are you here?

Their eyes are locked for a long moment, Inara's huge and sad, breaking; the Operative's completely cool. He doesn't answer her.

INARA (cont'd)

Jude, plea—

She catches herself, stops speaking.

Then he comes to her, touching her for the first time, taking her gently by the arm. She flinches away from him, but covers it quickly.

He leads her to the bed, and sits her down.

The Operative looks at her for a quiet moment.

OPERATIVE
River Tam.

Inara shifts, looks away. The Operative sits down beside her.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
She is of great interest to me.

INARA
You won't find her.

OPERATIVE
No, I won't. You will.

Eye contact.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
You're going to lead her to me, Inara.

INARA
What makes you think I'll do that?

OPERATIVE
Because I know you. I understand that this will be hard for you. You have fond memories of River Tam. Perhaps you even consider her your friend, and yourself her protector. She is, after all, so very young.

The Operative reaches over, pushes back a strand of Inara's hair.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
But I also know, my dear, that you are a woman of incredible resolve. Friend or not, River Tam is a danger to us all. You. Me. Every girl in the house. Even your Captain Reynolds. You will do what needs to be done, even if it hurts.

The Operative stands up, opens his briefcase. He turns around, taking out his sword, holding it in his hands, showing it to her.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
The sword is an instrument of great tradition and honour.

He sheaths it, turns to her.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
Like you, Inara, I am a creature of great resolve. Cross me, and there will be consequences.

He puts the sword away and picks up the briefcase.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
I trust you understand this.

She watches him coldly as he opens the door and walks out.

EXT. SAINT ELPIS – ESTABLISHING

We circle around the massive silver station, large, jagged holes all through the hull.
ZOOM through one of the holes INTO:

INT. SAINT ELPIS – CORRIDOR – CONTINUOUS

Zoe, Kaylee and Ben – all in spacesuits – make their way through the dim, narrow passageway. With the light from the hole in the hull fading, their flashlights are now the only source of light.

BEN
So... what happened to River? Or does no one care how we just almost died?

KAYLEE
Wha—? Nothing. Nothing happened to her. She's... fine.

ZOE
A little under the weather.

BEN
She didn't look sick.

WASH (via com)
Ben... We talked about—

BEN
She looked scared. And confused. And— What's going on, guys? Why are we even on this wreck?

ZOE

Data salvage. Data's worth a small fortune to the right folk. We told you all this...

BEN

I know. Just...

They turn the corner into—

INT. SAINT ELPIS – ROOM – CONTINUOUS

It's dark. They scan the room with their flashlights. In the arc of their moving beams of light, we catch glimpses of objects floating in the zero G – CUPS, photographic CAPTURES... and a SHOE.

BEN (cont'd)

...Something's not right.

They stare at the suspended debris of personal effects.

KAYLEE

How long do you think it's been here?

WASH (via com)

More than a while, according to Uni. Place was a waystation for the Alliance Reconstruction Brigade right up until the war.

KAYLEE

So ships passed this way, maybe went to Miranda?

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash studies a display.

WASH

Looks that way. A lot of ships hauling labour and parts.

KAYLEE (via com)

What happened?

WASH

War started and not so many people cared about terraforming on the outer edge, I guess. Universe wasn't sure if she was abandoned or what—

INT. SAINT ELPIS – ROOM – SAME TIME

WASH (cont'd, via com)
—but reports stopped coming and, and with so much else going on, no one seemed to notice. What got his attention was a misfiled manifest report sent from here referencing Miranda.

Throughout the talking, Ben is anxious and quiet.

KAYLEE
(looking around)
What coulda done this much damage to such a big place...

ZOE
We need to find the control center. Computer core's there. Let's move.

Zoe and Kaylee move off, but Ben looks around nervously, waving his torch erratically and breathing rapidly. He's spooked.

INT. SAINT ELPIS – CORRIDOR – MOMENTS LATER

Flashlights in the dark. Zoe is in the lead, Kaylee a bit behind, Ben lagging.

Large GLOBS of golden LIQUID float around them, reflecting in their torch-light. Ben doesn't see, and walks right into one.

BEN
(wiping his helmet)
What is this stuff?

KAYLEE
Looks like good ol' fashioned rocket fuel. Storage cells musta ruptured down here.

BEN
(pushing a glob away)
It's everywhere.

Kaylee's flashlight spots another floating object – a half-eaten APPLE.

KAYLEE
And the people are nowhere...

Silent contemplation, interrupted by—

WASH (via com)
Bridge should be about five meters past your next right turn.

The space suited trio make their way along the wrecked hallway. They turn the corner right and see:

SPACE where a big chunk of hull should be.

ZOE (into com)
Zhang fu <Husband>...

WASH (via com)
Make that your left.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY – SAME TIME

Mal stands at the entrance to the infirmary, looking in. Simon sits next to River, who is sedated on the bed, his attention fully upon her. Jayne is in the corner, arms folded and angry.

SIMON
I've never seen her this agitated... She's getting worse.

JAYNE
When ain't she?

SIMON
Captain, Miranda is her only—

But as Simon looks up, Mal is already gone.

INT. SAINT ELPIS – CONTROL CENTER – SAME TIME

Darkness.

A hatch OPENS on the far side of the room and three thin shafts of light shine through. Ben, Kaylee and Zoe stand at the hatchway.

The flashlight beams pick out details in the spacious room: some wall-mounted display panels; a few free-standing computer consoles; the shattered remnants of the room's large forward viewport. Bits of GLASS float everywhere, mixed with RIBBONS OF FUEL, PAPER, and... CLOTHING.

A torn SHIRT with some blood on it hovers in the corner.

BEN
Well. This is... homey.

ZOE
You think?

The three space-suited figures move into the control center.

WASH (via com)
So, you ready to pull your weight, Ben?

BEN (into com)
You're the one who dragged me all the way out here, just
to do your dirty work.

Zoe moves to examine the bloodied shirt.

WASH (via com)
Dirty work?

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

WASH (cont'd, into com)
(smiling)
I'm not sure squatting at a computer terminal is really
dirty work.

BEN (via com)
Because piloting is so hard on your *pì gu* all day. If you
want to swap, I'll be more'n happy.

Something on the console catches Wash's attention.

WASH (into com)
Well, I think today you may have to break a sweat. I'm
not getting any response from the *Saint Elpis'* systems.
The computer core has no power.

INT. SAINT ELPIS – CONTROL CENTER – SAME TIME

ZOE (into com)
Kaylee and I'll see if we can get the power turned on.
(to Ben)
You okay on your own for a while?

Ben is anything but, as Zoe and Kaylee leave.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY – SAME TIME

Simon stands before the wall-mounted com. He pushes the button.

SIMON (into com)
Zoe, Zoe, come in... uh, over.

ZOE (via com)
What is it, Doctor? We've got full hands here.

SIMON (into com)
(looks over at River)
It's River... I'm asking you. I'm pleading with you. The captain won't hear me ou—

ZOE (via com)
The Captain will deal with you when he's good and ready.

In the corner, Jayne snorts sarcastically.

SIMON (into com)
And when's that going to be? He's turning his back on everything. Burying his head in the sand!
(snide)
I guess you're the captain now any—

ZOE (via com)
I suggest you stop before you say something genuinely ill-advised, Doctor.

Her line shuts with a click. In the corner, Jayne grins while Simon stews.

INT. SERENITY – SHUTTLE ONE

Mal sits on the empty shuttle floor beside Inara's old CHEST. He opens it and pulls out a small GLASS PERFUME BOTTLE.

Mal opens the cap and takes a sniff. He sighs, closing his eyes.

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S ROOM – LATER

Inara opens her eyes. She stands before the Buddha statue, holding two INCENSE STICKS – one white, one black – as if balancing them.

She puts the white one down, then lights the second one and quickly blows it out. She bows her head as she places it before the altar, praying under her breath.

She reaches underneath the altar, pulling out a thin, ornately carved WOODEN BOX, about six inches long and four inches wide.

Inara OPENS the box.

At first glance, none of the items seem particularly harmful. A small RING OF KEYS, a TUBE that might be lipstick, two SILK BAGS, one yellow and one green...

...and a pre-filled syringe filled with dark liquid. It is the BLACK VIAL that she used on Atherton Wing in 'Open Wounds.' Beside the syringe itself are two small glass bottles filled with the same dark liquid – refills.

Inara grabs the YELLOW SILK BAG and pours the contents into her palm:

TEA LEAVES.

INT. SAINT ELPIS – POWER RELAY STATION – LATER

Kaylee's torch light hits something in the darkness. It's a massive SPIKE that has been driven through the middle of the room, into one of three POWER SUPPLY CELLS. It has a certain barbaric organic shape to it.

KAYLEE

That looks like what used to be a power cell, but it's upside down.

(tilts her head)

Or we are.

Kaylee and Zoe rotate one hundred eighty degrees so that we now see that we're looking at a large console with a bank of switches and dials.

ZOE

Can you get it working?

Kaylee pushes herself underneath the console, and removes the metal casing.

KAYLEE

I can bypass the broken cell, an' the other two should light up just fine. Enough juice for the computer, anyhow.

Kaylee pushes herself further between two of the three power cells.

ANGLE: From the darkness behind Kaylee, we see the back of the shoulders and head of a space-suited OBSERVER, bobbing slightly in the zero-G, watching Kaylee and Zoe.

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – CORRIDOR

CLOSE ON: Boots marching through the hallway.

ZOOM OUT: To reveal the Operative. Something passes across his face. Now, he's running through the hallway, clearly displeased.

CUT TO: Inara's bedroom door, noticeably unguarded. The Operative tears through the door, into—

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S ROOM – CONTINUOUS

The guards lay unconscious on the floor, sitting on the pillows beside the tea-set. Inara is gone.

The Operative picks up a tea-cup, smells it. In a flash of anger, he throws it across the room. It shatters.

EXT. BENA – PORT TOWN – ESTABLISHING – NIGHT

The small port town sits at the turn of a river. Many small boats are tied to docks, and the outer edge of the town is ringed by landing fields.

EXT. BENA – PORT TOWN – DOCKS – NIGHT

A LOCAL DOCKWORKER finishes tying a small MOTORIZED BOAT to a dock.

A CLOAKED FIGURE steps off the boat onto the dock, handing a few coins to the dockworker.

EXT. BENA – PORT TOWN – NIGHT

The cloaked figure moves with purpose through town, past various UNSAVORY TOWNSPEOPLE.

EXT. BENA – SHIPYARD – NIGHT

OBUN, fifties, a general (last seen arguing with Inara and Sheydra in 'Pull the Trigger'), stands beside a MILITARY CARGO SHIP, barking orders to a half-dozen UNIFORMED MEN. A few more soldiers lounge near a QUONSET HUT on the far side of the landing field.

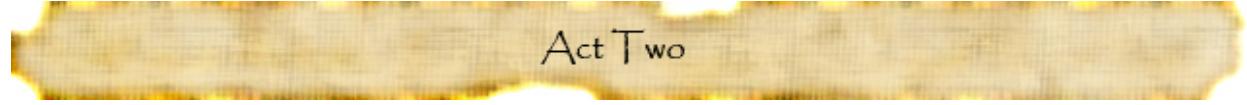
OBUN

Well, hurry it up! We're already running late and—

He stops. The cloaked figure stands before him, perfectly serene.

OBUN (cont'd)
Who the hell are—

Inara lowers the hood of her cloak.



Act Two

EXT. BENA – SHIPYARD – NIGHT

Obun regards Inara with equal amusement and annoyance. She smiles back enigmatically.

OBUN
Companion Serra.

INARA
Please, call me Inara.

He motions to his men. They gather around.

OBUN
I must say, Inara, it is quite a surprise to see you here,
so far from the training house.

INARA
The pleasure's all mine, General.
(glancing at the men)
Can we go somewhere more... private?

OBUN
(knowing smile)
I don't think that will be necessary.

INARA
(business-like)
General Obun, I think you misunderstand me. I've come
to talk business. Your business. Not mine.

OBUN
Well, then talk. Anything you have to say to me, you can
say in front of my men.

She nods and steps forward.

INARA

I want passage.

OBUN

Passage?

INARA

I don't care to where, as long as it's off world, and it's now.

OBUN

I must say, it's rather... unexpected that you would come here to me. Surely, there must be another ship you would find more... friendly.

INARA

Let's not deceive ourselves, General. You're not blind to current events. You're the only one who can help me and we both know it.

He grins, clearly pleased with his power.

OBUN

Is that a fact?

INARA

Every ship in this port is subject to military inspection. All cargo and passengers are carefully documented.

(touches his uniform provocatively)

Military vessels, on the other hand...

OBUN

Are above the rules.

INARA

Precisely.

They size each other up.

INARA (cont'd)

I can offer payment, of course. My only demand is your silence in the matter. I can't be followed.

OBUN

Silence can be bought.

Inara smiles again, genuinely this time. She has him where she wants him.

INT. SAINT ELPIS – POWER RELAY STATION

ANGLE: Over the space-suited shoulder of the observer hiding in the darkness, we watch Kaylee, still underneath the broken power cell, and Zoe.

KAYLEE
See if you can find a circuit breaker.

Zoe walks around, playing the torch over the walls, ceiling and floor.

ZOE
Where—

KAYLEE
There should be one... somewhere.

Zoe walks straight toward the observer—and us—waving the torch.

ZOE
(quietly)
Qin ai di shang di <Dear God>.

KAYLEE
Zoe? What is it?

Kaylee pokes her head out of from under the power cell and looks past Zoe, straight at the observer.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
Oh.

ANGLE: On Zoe and the observer. The observer is dead, floating, angled slightly downward like a drowned man.

Zoe plays the torchlight lower. The corpse is sliced in half, at the abdomen, the two parts connected only by a jagged strip of space suit. Dried bone protrudes from both parts, and the legs twist slowly, independent of the upper half.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
Di yu <Hell>!

EXT. BENA – SHIPYARD – NIGHT

Inara watches as Obun counts the money. He finishes, looks up at her, and smiles.

INARA
Excellent. Now, if you'll escort me aboard—

OBUN
(pleased with himself)
I think you're forgetting something.

Obun's men eye her like a piece of meat. Her smile fades.

OBUN
What? You thought cash was all we'd be taking?

INARA
(low, flat tone)
You'll be taking nothing. Give me my coin.

OBUN
(motioning to his men)
Deal's a deal, sweetheart.

One of Obun's men grabs at Inara's wrist.

She blocks him and kicks him in the groin, sending him on the ground.

Another man grabs her and punches her in the face.

Inara stumbles backwards, then twists away from him.

But there's another one. He hits her in the stomach, HARD, knocking her down.

Inara looks up at them. They're trained soldiers, and there are more than half a dozen of them. It's a fight she can't win. But...

She gets up, throws a martial arts KICK at one of the men. He stumbles, but doesn't fall down.

Two other men grab her from behind, brutally wrestling her back to the ground.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE

Wash sits alone on the bridge, listening to the com chatter.

ZOE (via com)
Focus, Kaylee. What next?

KAYLEE (via com)
(shaky)
I need a... I'm gonna need a circuit breaker.

ZOE (via com)
Do you see one?

INT. SAINT ELPIS – POWER RELAY STATION – SAME TIME

Kaylee shakes her head.

KAYLEE

I got a universal one on Serenity. In my room.

ZOE

Your room?

KAYLEE

Yeah, so?

ZOE

Xiao di ji <Little chicken>, we need to find you a man.

(into com)

Wash, you reading this?

WASH (via com)

A man. Check.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

WASH (into com)

I'll start the interviews. Blond or brunet, Kaylee?

ZOE (via com)

Wash...

Wash stands and stretches like he's been sitting a LONG time.

WASH (into com)

Been cooped up on this bridge all day anyhow. Universal circuit breaker. Kaylee's room. Gotcha.

INT. SAINT ELPIS – CONTROL CENTER – SAME TIME

Ben's kit-bashed FUTURISTIC LAPTOP hovers as he connects it to a deactivated console. Ben himself hovers off the floor, looking around the darkness.

BEN (via com)

(nervous laugh)

Don't take too long. Pretty lonely over here.

INT. SAINT ELPIS – POWER RELAY STATION – SAME TIME

Kaylee looks at Zoe. Grins a little shakily.

KAYLEE

And I'll find me a man when I'm good 'n ready. Men're all just trouble anyhow...

EXT. BENA – SHIPYARD – NIGHT

Inara is on her knees, struggling, pinned down by soldiers on either side.

Her arms are BRUISED, and BLOOD trickles from a swollen CUT above her eyebrow. More blood comes from her split LIP.

The soldiers pull at her clothes.

Obun walks up to her, taps a bruise forming on her face.

OBUN

It's a shame we had to ugly you up.

Inara spits blood in his face.

Obun laughs, wipes it off.

OPERATIVE (OS)

Let her go now, and I will show you mercy.

The Operative steps into the light. He's wearing his glasses, and has his katana in a scabbard on his back.

Obun is unimpressed. He motions to his men.

One of them rushes at the Operative.

The Operative KICKS the soldier hard in the chest, sending him to the ground.

Before he can get up, the Operative grabs him and slugs him in the head, knocking him unconscious.

The Operative removes his glasses and places them carefully in a pocket.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

Let her go.

Two more soldiers rush at the Operative. He sends the first one down with a blow to the face, and hits the second in the KNEECAPS, causing a sickening CRUNCH.

Three more come forward, but the Operative sees it coming. One is a slumped pile on the floor before he even has time to attack.

The Operative blocks the attacks of the other two, who kick at him in a unified attack. He grabs one by the foot, twisting and breaking his ankle, throwing him to the ground. The other he kicks hard in the throat, sending the soldier to the ground, gasping.

The Operative then turns to the final two soldiers – the ones holding Inara. They throw Inara down and stand up, ready to fight.

It doesn't last long, and then they're on the ground, too, one unconscious, the other with a broken arm.

Only the Operative and Obun remain standing.

The Operative looks at Inara momentarily. She looks back up at him, shocked and in pain.

OBUN

That was... certainly impressive...

The Operative begins to circle Obun.

OBUN (cont'd)

Look, take the girl. I won't stop you.

Obun throws Inara's money at the Operative's feet.

OBUN (cont'd)

Take the coin, too.

The Operative stops circling.

A drop of sweat rolls down Obun's cheek.

OPERATIVE

Do you know what your sin is, General?

The Operative reaches back.

OBUN

(nervous, angry)

This is your last chance. Take the money, take the girl, and walk away. You kill those soldiers? Fine. But I am a General. The Alliance will not overlook my death—

OPERATIVE

It's lust.

In one quick motion, the Operative draws his sword and slashes forward.

Inara covers her eyes with her hands, crying out.

Obun's eyes glass-over – His bleeding body falls to the ground.

The Operative cleans his sword with a white cloth.

Inara watches, stunned, as the Operative sheaths his sword.

Then he walks over to Inara, takes her into his arms, and carries her away.

INT. SAINT ELPIS – CONTROL CENTER

Alone in the dark, Ben flicks a switch at the terminal connected to his floating laptop. The terminal briefly flickers to life, only to turn off again.

BEN
(for the umpteenth time)
Wo xu yao wo di mu ai! <I need my maternal love>
(into com)
Kaylee, it went again.

INT. SAINT ELPIS – POWER RELAY STATION – SAME TIME

Underneath the power relay console—

KAYLEE
Almost...

—SPARKS fly from the newly installed CIRCUIT BREAKER, held in place with wire and prayer. Kaylee jerks her hand back.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
(shouting)
Piece of *go se!* Dammit!
(hits the console each time she says:)
Dammit Dammit DAMMIT!

Zoe and Wash—now in a space suit, too—look down at her.

ZOE
Easy, Kaylee. I'm sure the wires didn't mean it.

Kaylee pulls herself up from underneath the console – defeated, a tear in her eye.

ZOE (cont'd)
This ain't like you, Kaylee. What's going on?

KAYLEE
I'm just... I dunno. Everything that's happened.

ZOE
We've seen worse. Made it out kickin'.

KAYLEE
Things're different now...
(eye contact)
The Cap'n's different.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

The conversation plays to the empty bridge via the open com channel.

KAYLEE (cont'd, via com)
We ain't barely seen him since we left Haven. Ever since
Inara...

INT. SAINT ELPIS – POWER RELAY STATION – SAME TIME

ZOE
The captain... Mal's just trying to sort out his head.

WASH
I don't know, *mì táo* <honey peach>. Kaylee has a point.

KAYLEE
It's like he don't care. You seen it. He ain't like he was.
Lost somethin' inside a him, an' now he's...

ZOE
Reckless.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

We rotate around from Wash's console to the door:

KAYLEE (via com)
I was going to say 'sad'...

ZOE (via com)
Oh.

Mal stands there, looking tired.

EXT. BENA – MOUNTAIN ROAD – NIGHT

The Operative and Inara walk, side by side and in silence. Her bruises are more pronounced now. She tentatively fingers the cut above her eyebrow, winces as her fingers touch flesh.

OPERATIVE

A bracing night, isn't it?

(beat)

You were very clever, poisoning my men. You would have made a cunning strategist in another life.

He smiles, impressed. Inara does not respond.

They walk on a bit, their breath visible in the cool night air.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

(conversationally)

I must see River Tam dead before me.

Inara stops mid-stride.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

It sounds cruel, I am sure. That isn't how I mean it. We have tried to capture this girl before. For a time, we believed she was dead. Your Captain Reynolds is canny.

(nods to himself, almost in appreciation)

Then we saw pictures of her on Verbena. That's when I was assigned. When I came to you.

(faraway look)

This time, I will be sure the mission is completed. I will behold River Tam's body, and this will all be over.

INARA

River is just a girl.

OPERATIVE

(gently)

We both know that's far from true. She's a ticking bomb.

INARA

You don't really mean that.

OPERATIVE

Let me assure you, Inara, I do.

INARA
I know you. You're kind.

He smiles at her sadly, knowingly, but says nothing.

INARA (cont'd)
If you want someone dead, go after the men who did this to her. Kill them instead. If they had left her alone—

OPERATIVE
Then this never would have happened?

They lock eyes. The Operative is unyielding.

INARA
She's just a girl...

OPERATIVE
The girl named River Tam died on an operating table three years ago. You've known only a ghost.

INARA
She's getting better. The last time I saw her, she—

OPERATIVE
The last time I saw her, she confronted a warehouse full of trained Alliance soldiers and left not one standing.

(no reply)
Before that, she attacked a bar full of people. I have a copy of the feed, if you'd like to see exactly how "innocent" she is.

Inara walks away from him.

The Operative grabs her arm, spins her back around.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
Maybe I underestimated you, Inara. I thought you were a woman of reason. Of insight. And yet you can't seem to see the truth that is right in front of you. That girl is only going to bring destruction into countless lives.

(voice low, disgusted)
Look at you, a Companion running through the streets like a rat, looking for a ship to hide on.

He lets her go. She's frozen somewhere between fear and shame.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
I have saved your life. Now, you will deliver me hers in return.

He leaves her behind, cold breath coming from her lips, tears in her eyes.

INT. SERENITY – SIMON'S ROOM

Simon sits before a small WAVE monitor. He presses a couple of buttons.

SIMON
Connect to Inara Serra. Location, Bena. Companion Training House.

The words '*LOCATING*' appear on the screen, alongside a small spinning globe.

After a second:

WAVE MONITOR
Unable to connect. Cortex connection to Bena temporarily disabled.

Simon frowns. This doesn't happen very often.

WAVE MONITOR (cont'd)
Would you like to leave a message for later transmission?

SIMON
("damn")
Yes.
(beat)
Ni hao <Hello>, Inara. I'm sorry to leave you a message like this. But... I may not get another chance.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY

Simon moves quickly to a cabinet and removes a number of vials of different medicines. He packs them neatly into a bag.

SIMON (cont'd, VO)
Things are a little... crazy. Well, you know, more than usual.

He looks over at the sleeping face of his sister, and strokes her hair.

SIMON (cont'd, VO)
(despairing)
River is in so much pain and I... I just want to help her,
but the Captain is being such...

He then packs the green DELCIUM syringes on top, and closes the bag.

INT. SERENITY – SIMON’S ROOM

Simon throws what few belongings he and River have left into another bag.

SIMON (cont'd, VO)
I've made my decision. I just hope it's the right one.
Thank you for everything you did for River... for both of
us. *Qi dao wei wo men* <Pray for us>.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY

River stirs groggily.

SIMON (cont'd, VO)
I don't know if, or when I'll be able to contact you again...
(deep breath)
Because...

Simon comes in, a duffel bag over his shoulder. Looks straight at his sister.

SIMON (cont'd)
We're leaving.

Act Three

EXT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – NIGHT

An ALLIANCE GUNSHIP roars over the training house.

The Operative's heavily-armed troops stand guard at every exit, door, gate, and path.

Meanwhile, at an OPEN WINDOW, Inara looks out at the soldiers and ships.

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA’S BATHROOM – CONTINUOUS

She turns away from the window, resigned. Trapped.

The bathroom is very large, with soft lighting, pastel colours, and gold accents. It contains a mirror and a white BATHTUB, easily big enough for two; the water is running.

Inara turns away from the window, a resigned look on her face.

She walks to the tub and disrobes.

She steps in and turns off the water. She washes her back with a sponge, erasing patches of DIRT and dried BLOOD.

LATER

Inara, in a kimono-style robe, stands in front of the mirror brushing her damp hair. She's cleaned up, but the cuts on her face are easy to see.

She puts down the brush, and picks up a small GLASS BOTTLE, identical to the one Mal had earlier. She opens it, closes her eyes, and breathes in the smell.

KAYLEE (VO)

So you think what he did to River was right?

INT. SAINT ELPIS – POWER RELAY STATION

Kaylee is back under the console, twisting wires together.

ZOE

We did that to River. All of us.

Wash starts to play with a passing glob of fuel, but Zoe grabs his wrist.

KAYLEE

I didn't do that... I would never—

ZOE

We're in this together, Kaylee. The Captain has had to make some very difficult decisions lately. For you. For all of us. It's about trust.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Mal stands, listening to the com chatter.

KAYLEE (via com)

So can we... you know, trust the Captain?

A long pause with nothing but static.

INT. SAINT ELPIS – POWER RELAY STATION – SAME TIME

The room lights up in a fluorescent glow, saving Zoe from answering.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

Got it!

The power is on.

ZOE (into com)

Ben, you got lights?

INT. SAINT ELPIS – CONTROL CENTER – SAME TIME

The control center is awash with light. The computer screens across the walls blink to life.

Ben, hanging in space, taps away at a console's keyboard.

BEN (into com)

(looks up at screens, smiles)

Pretty pretty lights.

ZOE (via com)

How long do you need?

BEN (into com)

It's going to take a little while to work my way into the mainframe. It's all messed up and a lot of the program pathways have been lost—

ZOE (via com)

Ben, I don't need—

BEN (into com)

Wait. I've got something.

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S ROOM

Inara kneels in front of the Buddha statue. There is a soft knock at the door.

INARA

(standing)

Come in.

The Operative steps in, shutting the door behind him.

OPERATIVE

How are you?

There's no anger between them, just weariness.

INARA

You put me through all this, then ask how I am?

OPERATIVE

None of this is meant to hurt you. You know that.

INARA

I do.

She walks to the window, looks out.

INARA

River's killed before.

INT. SAINT ELPIS – CONTROL CENTER – SAME TIME

Ben floats above a bank of monitors, totally engrossed. His laptop bobs, connected to a different monitor by a loose cable.

BEN

Fragments of the Saint Elpis's logs. Some kind of project called Objective New Eden... Looks like it references Miranda.

(floats to another monitor)

Here's something interesting... Says the station has four long range remote shuttles for research.

WASH (via com)

Remote?

BEN

Yeah. Mostly for cargo hauls to nearby moons, according to this.

ZOE (via com)

Makes sense for the ARB. Saves on overhead for pilots.

BEN

Right. I think—

His floating laptop begins PINGING. He swims over to it.

BEN (cont'd)

Hang on, this looks like... Yeah. The Saint Elpis sent one of her shuttles to Miranda to investigate why the ARB suddenly stopped receiving Waves from the planet surface...

(he looks up)

That was the last recorded log entry. Twelve years ago.

ZOE (via com)

I don't like this...

BEN

There's a holo-recording attached to the log.

Ben pushes some more buttons, and on all screens a very badly flickering image appears: A crying WOMAN dressed in a smart ARB jumpsuit. There is a gun in her hand. She is talking but we can't hear her words.

Ben flicks a switch on one of the consoles, and suddenly, after a brief tuning whine, we can hear her words.

WOMAN

(very patchy)

—make a peace— —fighting— —talking... eating...—
—million people— —They just— —overloads— —sitting—

INT. SAINT ELPIS – POWER RELAY STATION – SAME TIME

The audio of the woman's voice fills the three helmets.

WOMAN (cont'd)

—to be quick— —the local transports— —people—

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Mal stands, concentrating, as the woman's words are played over the com.

WOMAN (cont'd)

—opposite— —creased— —madness—

The recording cuts out and the screen goes blank.

INT. SAINT ELPIS – POWER RELAY STATION – SAME TIME

Zoe and Wash look at each other. Kaylee is on edge.

ZOE
Is that it?

INT. ST ELPIS – CONTROL CENTER – SAME TIME

Ben moves from his laptop to two of the monitors.

BEN
That's all that's left in the buffer.

KAYLEE (via com)
Who was she?

BEN
Doesn't say, but the time log places the transmission
from the shuttle not long after she was due to arrive at
Miranda.

ZOE (via com)
So that shuttle made it to Miranda?

BEN
I... I guess so.

INT. SAINT ELPIS – POWER RELAY STATION – SAME TIME

Silence.

WASH
(beat)
So what happened then?

All eyes drift to the severed corpse.

ZOE
Wash, get back to Serenity and tell the Captain about—

MAL (via com)
Tell him yourself.

INT. SERENITY BRIDGE – SAME TIME

KAYLEE (via com)
Cap'n... you... You heard that?

MAL (into com)
Every word.

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S ROOM – SAME TIME

Inara stands by the window; the Operative sits on the bed, listening.

INARA
Kaylee said River didn't even look. She just took the gun, closed her eyes, and shot. She killed three men without looking at them.

OPERATIVE
I'm sorry.

No response from Inara. She's numb.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
She was your friend. I'm sorry.

INARA
She... she did the math.

OPERATIVE
She's a genius.

Inara sighs, crosses the room, sits down on the bed again.

INARA
You knew who I was, didn't you? You contracted with Sheydra so that I wouldn't suspect, but it's true, isn't it? You knew about Mal. You knew I was a passenger on his ship. You were looking for me.

OPERATIVE
Yes.

INARA
(upset but not surprised)
Why pretend to...
(she looks at him)
You know, I really did believe that you cared about me.

OPERATIVE
I do.

She shakes her head.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
I do.

She blinks back tears before they fall.

INARA
I'm tired. I'm so tired of all of this.

OPERATIVE
(stands)
You should sleep.

She nods, draws her legs up onto the bed, lays down. The Operative bends down, pulls a cover over her. She looks tired.

INARA
Stay with me?

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

Simon and River are suited up in spacesuits, Simon adjusting River's helmet.

RIVER
(groggy)
Sailing away. Goodbyes all 'round. They're coming.
(to Simon)
You should listen to the voices.

SIMON
I don't hear the voices, *mei mei*.

RIVER
You hear the Captain's.

SIMON
We're not his number one priority right now. Or his
number one-hundredth. We have to look after ourselves.

JAYNE (OS)
You got it backward, doc.

Simon gets a fright, looks up. Jayne leans over the railing of the upper catwalk, a BOTTLE of Blue Sun Cola in one hand, looking down.

Simon looks at the vents on his suit. Realizes Jayne is right, and swaps them.

SIMON
Are you going to stop us?

Jayne takes a swig and walks off into the aft passage.

Simon punches the airlock controls. The inner doors begin to open.

INT. SAINT ELPIS – POWER RELAY STATION – SAME TIME

MAL (via com)
So all we got for our trouble is a whole lot of nothin'.

Wash eyes the floating body.

WASH
Creepy nothing.

KAYLEE
It don't have to be nothin', Cap'n.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

KAYLEE (cont'd, via com)
We ain't but a few hours out—

Mal leans back, closes his eyes.

MAL
We ain't goin' to Miranda.

ZOE (via com)
Kaylee's right, sir. Even if we don't go, it might not hurt to see if the station's radar can pick up anything we can't.

Mal says nothing.

EXT. SPACE – SAME TIME

The Tams float across to the Saint Elpis via the cable — Simon gliding nervously, River following groggily — barely visible with their suit lights turned off.

INT. SAINT ELPIS – CONTROL CENTER – SAME TIME

ZOE (via com)
Do it, Ben.

Ben taps a button. The screen changes to a 3-D radar display.

Ben taps another button and the display shifts to show a large dot tagged as MIRANDA.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Mal has the same display on a screen on the bridge. He leans forward.

MAL (into com)
Zoom it in.

The display shifts again.

The radar sweep shifts across the screen and a handful of CONTACTS pop up around Miranda.

INT. SAINT ELPIS – CONTROL CENTER – SAME TIME

Another sweep and now there are more contacts on the display. A lot more.

Another sweep. More contacts. A thick shifting MASS around Miranda.

BEN (via com)
Err, Mal?

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

MAL
Oh, juh jen sh guh kwai luh duh jean jan... <Oh, this is a happy development...>

Completely engrossed, Mal does not notice—

EXT. SAINT ELPIS – SAME TIME

One of the three remaining shuttles launches off the Saint Elpis, and into the black.

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA’S ROOM – LATER

The Operative sits beside Inara on the bed. He touches her hair, a small, intimate movement. He stops, studies her, perhaps admiring her, perhaps searching for a trap. And then:

OPERATIVE
Do you trust me, Inara?

INARA
I don't want to be alone right now.
(beat)
Please. Just... if you do care for me...

The Operative pauses, considering, then slowly he takes off his shoes.

He lies down on the bed with her, wrapping his arms around her from behind. Inara nestles back into him.

The Operative kisses her hair, eyes closed.

OPERATIVE
It's going to be all right.

He strokes her hair. Inara closes her eyes. For a moment, they lay there, at peace.

Inara opens her eyes. She turns over, facing him. She props herself up on her elbow, caressing his cheek with her free hand. She leans forward, kisses him. He kisses her back.

Suddenly, he pulls her closer to him, on top of him, hands caressing her back. Her hands trace down his chest, until they reach the bottom of his shirt. He sits up.

Their kiss breaks only long enough for her to pull his shirt over his head and throw it on the floor.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE

Mal looks at the radar readout from the Saint Elpis. Jayne wanders in and looks over his shoulder.

JAYNE
Mal, you're gonna wanna break out a bottle of the good—

Mal ignores Jayne.

BEN (via com)
What kind of fleet is that? It's more like...

MAL
(quiet, realization)
A swarm.

He looks at toward the Saint Elpis.

INT. SAINT ELPIS – POWER RELAY STATION – SAME TIME

Zoe, Wash and Kaylee float there, listening to the com chatter in confused silence.

MAL (cont'd, via com)
Zoe, get everyone back here! *MASHANG <NOW>!*

INT. RESEARCH SHUTTLE – SAME TIME

Simon and River sit in the cramped shuttle. The controls are rudimentary. The computer console reads: "Coordinates set. Flight time to Miranda: 6 hours 36 min."

River, still very groggy from the sedative, can barely lift her head.

RIVER
(whisper)
...coming... They're...

SIMON
Sleep, *mei mei*. When you wake up, we'll—

Simon sees something through the viewport in the space ahead of them. He squints. It's a small ship.

Coming straight at them.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Jayne looks at Mal wide-eyed. Then back to the screen.

JAYNE
Those are ALL ruttin' Reaver ships!?

MAL
Go get the doc an' tell him—

JAYNE
(still eyeing the screen)
Doc ain't here no more.

That stops Mal.

MAL
What d'you— Where is he?

EXT. SPACE – SAME TIME

A ship splattered in what looks like blood makes a smoky trail towards Simon's shuttle.

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S ROOM

Inara and the Op are making love in Inara's bed.

We hold on them for a moment, then pan to the Buddha statue. Beside the incense sits the EMPTY BLACK SYRINGE.



Act Four

EXT. SPACE

Simon's shuttle is being pursued by the Reaver ship. And it's gaining fast.

INT. RESEARCH SHUTTLE – SAME TIME

The computer console screen shows: "Coordinates altered. Flight time to Saint Elpis Station: 3 min 13 sec."

Simon looks at the radar, panic on his face. The Reaver ship is a red dot blipping closer and closer to the white dot representing the shuttle.

Simon watches River thrash in her sleep, like she's having a nightmare.

He reaches into his bag and pulls out a pair of SYRINGES and a BOTTLE labelled "Morphine."

He presses a button in the console.

SIMON (into com)
Captain... I don't think we're going to make it. You
should... you should get clear, while—

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Everyone – still in their spacesuits – has joined Mal and Jayne on the bridge. Wash is seated and flipping switches.

MAL (into com)
Much as I like noble sentiment, Doc, I ain't losin' no more
gorram crew! *Dong ma?* You just keep coming!

Wash looks at the radar, Ben looking over his shoulder. The red blip of the Reaver
ship is close behind the white blip of the shuttle.

WASH
He won't make it, Mal.

BEN
(‘lightbulb’)
But you could.

Ben pushes past the others to the co-pilot's seat. He immediately starts typing.

WASH
Maybe. But I'm not on the shuttle being pursued by
Reavers. Which, of course, I'm all manner of thankful for.

Ben looks up, still tapping away, and looks at Wash like he's an idiot. Then—

WASH
("d'oh!")
Right! Because they're REMOTE shuttles! I can fly it from
here!
(taps buttons)
This should be fun.

MAL
You're going to need to bring them straight towards us,
Wash.

JAYNE
What!? You bringin' the ruttin' Reavers to us now?!

MAL
It's just one ship, Jayne.

WASH
I put our chances at... Better than usual.

Zoe leans over Ben's shoulder.

ZOE
Good as those odds sound, I have a different idea.

She reaches down, scrapes off some of the amber ROCKET FUEL Ben previously walked into off his suit. She holds her finger up.

ZOE (cont'd)
(to Mal)
Rocket fuel, sir.

KAYLEE
Station's lousy with it.

Mal and Zoe share a look.

ZOE
Jayne, I'm going to need your grenades.

INT. RESEARCH SHUTTLE – MOMENTS LATER

Simon's still fiddling with the syringes.

SIMON
You want me to WHAT?!?

MAL (via com)
Trust me, Doctor.

SIMON
That hasn't been very high on my to-do list for some time, Captain.

The console beeps a warning.

MAL (via com)
And gettin' made a meal of by Reavers is?

Simon slaps a button. The console reads: "*Navigation Override Accepted.*"

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

On the radar display, the red blip is virtually on top of the white blip. Wash grips Serenity's controls. Zoe and Jayne are no longer on the bridge.

WASH (into com)
Hold onto something.

EXT. SPACE – SAME TIME

As the Reaver ship bears down on the shuttle, the shuttle suddenly DIPS and fires a burst from its manoeuvring jet, spinning crazily almost all the way around directly BENEATH as the Reaver ship zooms overhead.

INT. RESEARCH SHUTTLE – SAME TIME

Simon and River are thrown about. One of the syringes smashes against a wall.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash's face is screwed up in concentration.

WASH

This is harder than I thought.

EXT. SPACE – SAME TIME

The shuttle rights itself and rockets toward the Saint Elpis.

The Reaver ship comes around in pursuit and both ships bear down on the station.

Serenity sits off the Saint Elpis, airlock doors open.

INT. SERENITY – AIRLOCK – SAME TIME

Zoe faces the Saint Elpis, helmet back on, harpoon gun in hand.

On the end of the loaded harpoon sits a GRENADE, a small red light blinking warning.

EXT. SPACE – SAME TIME

The shuttle passes through the narrow docking ring of the station and out the other side.

INT. SERENITY – AIRLOCK – SAME TIME

WASH (cont'd, via com)

Now, Zoe!

Zoe fires the harpoon and it rockets off, straight towards the Saint Elpis.

EXT. SPACE – SAME TIME

Serenity pitches up and away from the Saint Elpis.

The Reaver ship is barely a hundred metres away from the Saint Elpis now, as the shuttle continues to race out and away from the station.

CLOSE ON: The harpoon, as it passes through a hole in the Saint Elpis's hull—

EXT. SAINT ELPIS – SAME TIME

There is a FLASH from within the Saint Elpis, then—

EXPLOSIONS. Lots of them. Short, sharp, bright blossoms as different sections of the station explode and—

One of them catches the Reaver ship as it comes too close to the station, unable to move away in time.

The Reaver ship EXPLODES.

EXT. SPACE – SAME TIME

The shuttle tumbles, buffeted by the shockwaves.

INT. RESEARCH SHUTTLE – SAME TIME

The shuttle vibrates, tossing Simon and River around. The second syringe falls to the floor and shatters.

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S ROOM

The Operative sits on the edge of Inara's bed, fully dressed, but for his shoes, which he is currently putting on.

He finishes and stands.

INARA (OS)

You should sit down.

Inara stands in the doorway of the bathroom, half hidden in shadow, robe drawn about her. Her face is neutral but tight.

INARA (cont'd)
(whispers)
I'm sorry.

The Operative, still standing, stares at her blankly.

Still concealed in shadow, she takes a deep breath, then another.

INARA (cont'd)
The people on Serenity, they're my family. Or, they used to be. But I still carry strength they gave me. I always will, and I'll always want to.
(beat)
You were right about me, Jude. I do what needs to be done.

OPERATIVE
Inara, what are you—?

She steps into the light, moving closer. She's holding the empty syringe.

INARA
I suspect that by now, you're beginning to feel a tightness in your chest, possibly accompanied by light-headedness... nausea.

He doesn't react.

INARA (cont'd)
(tears in her eyes)
I'm sorry, Jude. I want you to know that none of this was meant to hurt you. I just... It's what needs to be done.

Again, no reaction.

INARA (cont'd)
Shortness of breath will follow soon. At this point, I suspect you have no more than five minutes to live. Long enough for you to take revenge against me, certainly, but River and Mal will be—

OPERATIVE
Do you think I don't know about you?

Inara freezes. The Operative smiles.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

I have to admit, Inara, my opinion of you has quite diminished. That you would think I didn't know who you were, what you've done...

INARA

You knew?

OPERATIVE

Yes, Inara. Of course I knew.

The Operative walks toward her.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

You're wondering, I imagine, how I was able to get the anti-toxin?

INARA

Sheydra gave it to you.

He takes the syringe from Inara's unresisting hand.

OPERATIVE

Now, there's the girl I know and love. Insightful.

INARA

What did you tell her? Did you threaten her? The children?

OPERATIVE

Before I came to your room tonight, Sheydra and I had a little chat. I explained who I was, what I wanted, and how she would help me.

He holds the syringe up to the light, studying it.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

She doesn't have your will, Inara. She offered her complete cooperation.

He throws the syringe into the corner of the room, where it SHATTERS. Inara cringes away from him.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

Don't pretend to be surprised. If you honestly believed that you could rely on the Guild to protect you, you wouldn't have bothered seeking out Obun. You would have gone to Sheydra.

INARA

Your guards would have stopped me.

OPERATIVE

You were able to sneak past them before. No, you didn't go to Sheydra because you know she understands the relationship between the Guild and the Alliance.

(off her silence)

Then again, perhaps you were simply running to your mariner? Thinking not with your head, but with your heart.

INARA

You could have been tracking me. If I did that, I'd risk leading you right to him.

OPERATIVE

Ah, so you do understand.

He comes around close behind her.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

(whispering in her ear)

You are completely alone.

The Operative steps away from Inara. He goes to the door, begins to open it.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

You have crossed me, Inara. Twice, in fact. And, as I warned you, for that, there are consequences.

INARA

You wouldn't hurt me. You need me to lay your trap for you.

OPERATIVE

No, Inara, I won't hurt you.

The Operative signals the guards outside the door. They come inside. A very nervous SHEYDRA is with them. One of the guards is carrying the Operative's sheathed sword.

INARA

No...

SHEYDRA

Inara? What's going on? Jude, you said that all you wanted—

OPERATIVE

All I want is Inara.

SHEYDRA

Then what is the meaning of this? Tell your guards to release me.

INARA

(to the Operative)

Please...

OPERATIVE

Sheydra, you are a fine woman. An honourable woman.

INARA

Jude, please!

THE OPERATIVE

This... It is an honourable way to die.

His sword is out before he can say another word. Sheydra gasps as he RAMS the blade into her chest.

Inara screams.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – MINUTES LATER

Simon and River come up through the airlock in the undercarriage. Mal extends a hand to help Simon up and to his feet.

SIMON

I don't know what to say, Captain. Thank y—

MAL

Still wanna go to Miranda, Doctor?

And he walks off, not expecting an answer.

RIVER

(watching Mal go)

None of it matters. Not a thing...

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – SAME TIME

RIVER (cont'd, VO)

Nothing, but to lie down and die.

Inara holds Sheydra in her arms, covered in blood. Sheydra tries to speak, but can't. Blood bubbles from her lips.

INARA
Shh... shh... you mustn't speak... shh...

Inara's tears fall onto Sheydra's face, mingling with the blood. Inara uses the sleeve of her robe to try to wipe Sheydra's face clean.

INARA
Shh... shh... it's going to be all right... Let Buddha guide you into the next life...

Sheydra sputters. Her eyes glaze over.

Inara holds her for a moment, then, her hand shaking, closes Sheydra's eyes.

Inara sobs. The Operative stands above her, impassive.

INARA (cont'd)
You're a monster.

OPERATIVE
Yes, I am.

He grabs Inara and forces her to her feet. Sheydra's body falls to the floor.

Inara stares the body. The Operative puts his hand under Inara's chin, forcing her to look at him.

OPERATIVE
Are you ready to cooperate?

Inara stares back at him, then glances briefly at Sheydra, dead on the floor. Inara is broken. There is no more fight in her. It's gone.

She turns back to the Operative, begins to sob again as she nods: Yes.

BLACKOUT